

# WEEKLY MEMO

**Date:** December 17, 2010

**To:** Mayor Lynn Stauss. Council President Dick Grassel, Vice President Henry Tweten, Council Members Marc Demers, Craig Buckalew, Wayne Gregoire, Greg Leigh, and Mike Pokrzywinski.

**From:** Scott Huizenga

**RE:** Weekly Update

## **UPCOMING MEETINGS:**

*December 21, 2010 – 5:00 pm – Council Meeting – Council Chambers*

*December 24, 2010 – City Hall Closed – Christmas*

*December 28, 2010 – 5:00 pm – Work Session – Training Room (If Needed)*

*December 31, 2010 – City Hall Closed – New Years*

## **WEEKLY UPDATE:**

### **Minnesota Chamber of Commerce**

The Minnesota Chamber of Commerce has released two related reports as part of its legislative agenda. The first report deals with public sector compensation. The Minnesota Taxpayers Association conducted the report. Generally, the report calls for scaling back public sector salaries and employment. But, it also contains information that can be misleading if taken out of context, vague, or in some instances, contradictory. For example, the report calls for reduced public employment while it acknowledges that Minnesota already ranks in the bottom half of states (31<sup>st</sup>) in the number of government employees per capita, and that the number of government employees has decreased since 2001. Further, the report notes that public sector wages grew by an inflation-adjusted 0.85 percent per year from 2001-2009; and it does not provide a comparable figure for the private sector. Finally, the report acknowledges that the public sector compensates many professional positions at rates lower than their private sector counterparts even if general and paraprofessional rates are higher. Overall, the report characterizes Minnesota public compensation as “average to above average” relative other states. Some of the report recommendations have merit, however, including a call for more prominent reporting of binding arbitration rulings from the Bureau of Mediation Services (BMS).

That report leads indirectly to one of the Chamber’s top legislative agenda items for the new session – the elimination of Local Government Aid (LGA) and all other local aids and credits programs. The Chamber proffers the notion that aids should be eliminated, government agencies consolidated, and virtually all services should be privatized. The East Grand Forks City Council and several other city councils throughout the state has on several occasions vehemently opposed further cuts to LGA. As the Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities has noted, the Chamber seems to be comparing LGA expenditures to large increases in other state programs that have led in part to a \$6.2 billion projected deficit. In fact, LGA has been reduced on several occasions since 2003 both through formula changes and through unallotments. The 2011 LGA budget is already cut from prior years before the legislature convenes in January.

The Chamber reports and legislative agenda is available through its web site at [www.mnchamber.com](http://www.mnchamber.com).

### **SAFER grant**

Chief Gust reported to the City Council at Tuesday's work session that the City has a very good chance of receiving a federal Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant. The grant, if awarded, would fully fund a firefighter position for two years. The City would then maintain the current staffing levels for at least one additional year. The timing of this *possible* award is especially fortuitous because the City currently has a firefighter vacancy. And, the City held preliminary interviews this week with several candidates. The City could receive over \$100,000 for federal funding if the position is vacant at the time of the award.

### **DeMers Professional Building**

The Economic Development and Housing Authority (EDHA) held a public hearing Tuesday regarding the pending sale of the DeMers Professional Building. The sale is expected to be completed in January. The City's General Fund stands to benefit not only from the property sale, but also from the elimination of the annual subsidy to the building of \$8000-10,000.

### **Arena lease**

I have instructed the City Attorney to draft an amended arena lease agreement to encapsulate the proposed facility upgrades as proposed under "Option 3." The Council and school board members discussed this option at Tuesday's work session. The estimated cost including design, administration, and contingency is approximately \$400,000. It would also include ADA improvements. The proposed arrangement would adjust the base rent annually for a minimum 10-year term using the Implicit Price Deflator (IPD) (i.e. inflation) as reported by the State of Minnesota. The school district would also pay for half of the project's cost; amortized over 10 years with a 4.5 percent interest rate. This rate is approximately what the City's bonding cost would be in the current economic climate. The school board and the City Council will consider the lease in January; so that the terms and conditions are established before construction.

### **Building Improvements and Energy Efficiency**

The Building Official brought an HVAC contractor back to City Hall this week to continue repairs on the system, on which I have previously reported. I am pleased to report that most of the systems are fully operational. Regular visitors to City Hall will notice immediately that climate-controlled areas of City Hall (including the Council Chambers) now are temperate and consistent throughout the building. Further, the system is quieter; and it is cycling on and off as designed. The city treasury also will realize significant cost savings as a result of the repairs and upgrades. I believe that \$10,000 - \$20,000 in annual cost savings is a realistic estimate. Continued energy efficiency improvements include the installation of the recently-approved window blinds and the automation of City Hall lighting so that most lights will be off when not in use.

## **DEPARTMENT REPORTS:**

### **Library, Charlotte Helgeson**

There will be no Library Board meeting in December. Our next meeting will be January 25<sup>th</sup> at 7 a.m. in the Library's large meeting room.

### **Public Works, John Wachter**

Holiday Fiesta (Potluck) is December 17, 2010 beginning at noon at the city shop. We are also collecting for the "Code 3" (Toys for Tots) program.

### **FLOOD CONTROL SYSTEM/STORMWATER**

The work at both L8 (871 James Ave SE) and K1 (Valley Golf) storm lift stations is still ongoing. Additional pumps have been added to each lift station and we are waiting for the electrical side to be completed. The two gate shafts at the L8 storm lift station have been completed and final checks to the control mechanisms are ongoing.

The sill plate reconstruction has been advertised for bid by the Army Corps of Engineers. The plates at Demers and Bygland will be entirely replaced next year as part of the Corps "loose ends".

### **STREETS**

Snow removal continues. All equipment has been repaired and placed back in service.

### **WASTEWATER**

SCADA upgrades to the lift stations continues. The wastewater team and water and light are diagnosing and repairing communication issues at several sites throughout the system.

### **Police Department, Chief Mike Hedlund**

The Minnesota Chiefs of Police Association recently held an essay contest for 8<sup>th</sup> grade students around the State of Minnesota. Students were asked to write about how electronics and technology can be used for good. The MCPA planned to recognize thirty-seven students with certificates and \$100 prizes. The East Grand Forks Police Association joined in on this project by sponsoring a prize of \$25 for the best local essay. Nine local students entered the contest and three were chosen as winners in the state contest. EGF Central Middle School Students Abby Plumley, Bethany Van Eps and Erin Olson were all recognized for their outstanding entries. In addition Olson's essay was chosen by the EGFPA as the top local entry. Their certificates and checks were presented to the winning students by EGF Chief of Police Michael Hedlund at Central Middle School on December 15, 2010.

Preparations for the EGFPD Dispatch Center remodel have begun with IT staff preparing to move radios etc. within the building to allow for the construction. G. W. & Sons Construction has ordered materials and the project should begin in the near future.

The December 10, 2010 drug bust in Grand Forks stemmed from an investigation conducted by the Pine to Prairie Drug Task Force. Three subjects were arrested and over \$100,000 worth of cocaine, marijuana and other drugs was seized as well as weapons and cash. These arrests were the culmination of a lengthy investigation and a large amount of cooperation between the two local task forces.

### **Fire Department, Chief Randy Gust**

The fire Department had its December drill and meeting on Dec. 6<sup>th</sup>. At this drill we asked for a list of names of members interested in training for confined space entry team. Six members elected to join and started their training on the 14<sup>th</sup> of this month.

I have responded to FEMA regarding the Safer Grant and should hear something back within the next few weeks stating if we are successful in obtaining the grant.

Dale Dahlen, a 37+ year veteran of the paid on call staff has tendered his resignation as of the 15<sup>th</sup> of Dec. He will be missed.

**Dave Aker, Parks and Recreation**

1 - Cross country skiing down in the campground

2 - Outdoor rinks at the Greenway and Stauss are open this weekend

**AGENDA ITEMS:**

The final meeting of 2010 contains largely routine items. Barring unforeseen circumstances, the City Council will next meet for its organizational session on January 4, 2011. The consent agenda for Tuesday includes the following.

- A special event permits for a snowmobile race on January 2.
- A raffle permit
- The final plat for the Coulee View addition. This is city-owned property commonly referred to as the “Stokes property.”
- The rates and agreements for the transit, paratransit, and senior rider operations.
- The adoption of the 2040 Land Use Plan.
- Calling the 2001 GO Bond issue to recapture interest rate savings.
- Feasibility report and authorizing plans and specifications for the Industrial Park infrastructure project, which is 75 percent grant-funded.